

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

IN OPPOSITION
TO L.D. 610**

**“AN ACT TO PROVIDE THAT INLAND WATERS STOCKED WITH FISH BY
THE STATE MAY NOT OPEN UNTIL THE NEXT JANUARY 1st”**

SPONSORED BY: Representative TIMBERLAKE of TURNER

CO-SPONSORED BY: Senator DAVIS of PISCATAQUIS
Representative BLACK of WILTON
Representative CRAFTS of LISBON
Representative DILLINGHAM of OXFORD
Representative MARTIN of EAGLE LAKE
Representative McCABE of SKOWHEGAN
Representative SHORT of PITTSFIELD
Representative WOOD of SABATTUS
Senator DILL of PENBSCOT

DATE OF HEARING: March 24, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Davis, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Michael Brown, Fisheries Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, in opposition to **L.D. 610**.

The proposed legislation will undermine efforts to maintain a very popular and heavily used put and take fishery specifically developed to provide early ice fishing opportunities throughout much of the state. Early ice fishing before January 1 (harvest allowed in December) is not only popular but also provides a strong economic boost to local economies at a time of the year when business can be very slow.

Our regional fisheries biologists determine which lakes and ponds are open to early season ice fishing based on water quality, angler interest, existing fishing opportunities, and ability of these waters to support cold water fish species. Most of the waters selected for these programs are small ponds where ice forms early and water quality will not

support cold water fish during other times of the year. Larger ponds stocked with put-grow-take species including brook trout, rainbow trout, brown trout, splake, and salmon are already closed to harvest before January 1.

In areas of Western Maine where there are limited ice fishing opportunities, our early season stocked waters (for example: Crowell, Norcross, Roxbury, Wesserunsett) are among our most popular. This popularity extends throughout the ice fishing season. Taking the early season fishing opportunity away from these anglers is counter to the message the Department has sent in recent years regarding increasing fishing opportunities.

In Eastern Maine there are many stocked waters that are general law and open to ice fishing as soon as ice forms. Since its inception, early season ice fishing has been increasing in popularity in this area and this proposal seeks to take away this opportunity.

In conclusion I would just like to remind the Committee that the Department strives to provide a variety of year round fishing opportunities for the angling public. Although many of these waters are open in the fall and early winter there are plenty of fish. The catch rates in these ponds are excellent and where you can keep fish a two fish daily bag limit helps spread the catch among all anglers.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.